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The Wedding

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Abstract

ALICE rushed into the room and threw her big, white straw hat on the bed. Her cheeks were flushed and her hair slightly out of place. "Hello, Margie, am I late?" "No, but get started dressing, we only have about twenty minutes before time to go." Margaret was sitting at the dressing table smoothing coral nail polish on her straight, smooth nails...

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"Hello, Margie, am I late?"

"No, but get started dressing, we only have about twenty minutes before time to go." Margaret was sitting at the dressing table smoothing coral nail polish on her straight, smooth nails.

"Margie—"

"Humn?"

"Tom just got in—that's why I was almost late." Alice pulled a ruffled pink slip up over her shoulders. "He's meeting me after the wedding—he's going, too."

"That's good, I'd like to know him, Alice." Margaret turned around and held her hands up before her, then stretched them out, "Like this shade?"

"Very nice. I'm sure you'd like Tom, Margie." Yes, Margaret would like Tom. Tom standing tall and big in the stag line at the Country Club dance that first night. Two years ago—he wasn't in uniform then. No, he was the best football player at Southern—and after that first night they had gone "steady" the rest of the year.

Spring of that year Tom had given her the ring—the plain diamond on her left hand. She looked down at it. And then the war took him out of school. He had volunteered into the Army and waited for a commission. Then, finally, the transfer to the Marines—and V-12. And V-12 men couldn't get married. Margaret interrupted Alice's thoughts.

"I think I would like him from what you've told me in letters. Say, Alice, I'm glad Lucia picked rose for you and blue for me—you'll make a lovely bridesmaid."

Alice looked at Margaret with a slight frown. Then she danced a step to the dressing table and picked up a pearl-backed brush. Quite suddenly she stood very still looking down at the brush in her hands. Standing there she felt a warmth of love for Margaret.

They had been friends for so long—grade school and paper dolls; junior high and utter scorn for men; then senior high when all men became important. Alice remembered weekends they had spent together—talking all night about trivial matters that had seemed big. And always she had taken it for granted that she could cry on Margaret's shoulder—tell her anything, things she couldn't say to anyone else. With a quick movement she hugged Margaret's shoulders and said, "Margie, I love that man!"

"I know what you mean—wish Allan could be here."

"That's just it, you don't know what I mean. Marg, can you keep things under your hat? . . . Oh, I know you can—"

"I've done it for you for a long time, haven't I, except the last two years we've been away at school. Hurry up, honey; Lucia would have duck fits if we made her wedding late."

"O.K., I'll hurry," Alice walked across the room and opened the closet door. She looked at the rose jersey formal and wondered why she hated so to put it on. By all things that were right she, too, should be wearing white lace—this day. This should have been her wedding day too. She took the dress from its hanger and turned back toward the room. She could trust Margaret—Margaret would know if her decision was right. "Margie, I've got to ask you something."

"What, honey?" Margaret swung around and picked up a tube of lipstick.

"Tom's here. I'm going away with him tonight."

"You mean you're going to meet his folks?"

"Well—" Alice hesitated, she could still stop—maybe Margaret wouldn't understand this time—but it was started now. She went on, "He asked me to go away with him, Margie—it is right, isn't it? I love him." Her voice sounded muffled from beneath the folds of the dress.

Margaret stood up and smoothed her long jersey skirt. "I am a minister's daughter, Alice. I have tried to be the exception to the rule that ministers' daughters turn out wrong. But I don't judge other people because of their emotions. Have you spoken to your parents?"

"The folks don't know—I didn't know how to tell them. Gee, it's hot."

"It's always hot for summer weddings. Alice—"

"Uuhu—where's a comb?"

"Here, in my bag. . . Alice, what do you mean—going away

with Tom. You've been frightened or nervous ever since you came in. Is that why?"

"Margie, remember way back in high school when Lucia and I always said we were going to be married on the same day?"

"Of course—I'd never say that I'd make it a triple wedding."

"Well—Tom and I can't get married until his commission comes through, and heaven knows when that'll be. Everything is so indefinite we don't even know if he'll get a commission before he goes overseas. Is my skirt straight?"

"You look grand—prettiest thing I've seen in a long time. Are you sure you want to go with him, Alice?"

Alice leaned close to the mirror and carefully applied the bright red lipstick. Then she turned and looked directly into Margaret's eyes. Her brown hair fell softly to her shoulders and the rose of the dress was reflected in the faint flush on her cheeks. But inside she felt afraid. Not just afraid of a break with conventions, with her family—but frightened at her own doubt of her judgment. Margaret had said, "I have never judged another person because of emotions." Alice could feel her heart pounding little drum rhythms on her ribs and wished she could get her breath. She hung her head and gave a slight, bewildered shrug to her shoulders. Just as a knock sounded at the door she murmured, "I don't know," scarcely loud enough for Margaret to hear before she opened the door. Lucia's father smiled at them from the doorway. "You girls ready to go?"

"Oh, yes, we're ready, Mr. Morris—Coming, Alice?"

The ride to the church had been hot. They had come down Bayshore Drive—past the conservatory, and Alice could remember the many times she and Margaret had walked along the sea wall on their way to music lessons. How many things had changed—would be more changed if she went away with Tom. She stood beside Margaret in the tiny room off the church lobby waiting for the wedding march and dabbing tiny drops of perspiration from her carefully powdered forehead. Several times she felt Margaret's brown eyes falling wonderingly on her face. As the last strains of "Because" faded away she wondered how much her friendship with Margaret would be altered if she took the ten o'clock train that night.

Lucia stood a little apart from the bridesmaids talking to her father. Every now and then she smiled at Margaret and Alice.

She looked happy—flushed with excitement, perhaps, but entirely unaware of any undercurrent of emotion other than her own. Alice watched her as she moved the veil a little to one side and envied such happiness. Then the music came bursting forth in the rhythm of the wedding march. Margaret reached out and squeezed Alice's hand.

"Ready honey?"

"Uh-huh—here I go."

Alice took her steps slowly . . . just as she had rehearsed them. Then she saw Tom's shoulders and the sleek, dark back of his head. His khaki uniform blended softly into the brown pew. Evenly and slowly—don't hurry—Oh, Tom! I wish you were standing up there waiting for me. She saw him turn his head as she moved closer to him. Now Margaret would be starting down the aisle. He looked up at her and she smiled quietly—his eyes! Then she was standing in front of the altar waiting—waiting. She wondered if Margaret really knew what she was talking about.

"Are you sure you want to go with him, Alice?" "I don't know—I don't know. My suitcase is all packed—the ten o'clock train tonight." "Alice, darling—I have the hotel room reserved—you will come, won't you?" "Yes, Tom, I'll come—I'll come—I'll come!" "Have you spoken to your parents?" "I didn't know how to tell them." "I have never judged another."

Somehow the ceremony didn't break through Alice's thoughts. She was aware of Margaret standing a little behind her, of Lucia, in white lace, looking up at Bob, of the minister's voice rising and falling—but her mind didn't hear the words. Once she caught, "Do you, Lucia Morris, accept this man—" and Tom's face rose before her—"You will come, won't you?" And later, it seemed much later, she heard the words "Holy matrimony." They twisted into her heart and made her feel as if her blood had been drawn from her veins.

Then suddenly she was aware of the sweet odor of white gladiolas—of the organ playing softly. All at once she wanted to cry, to reach out and feel Tom's face—to see Tom standing eagerly beside her, both of them answering the minister's low voice, "Do you take this man—this woman?" She believed in "Holy matrimony"; Tom believed in it, too. Perhaps they had both just forgotten for a while. They could wait a year, two years—

The organ boomed forth again. Lucia and Bob were running up the aisle. They looked so happy—so—Alice placed her hand

upon the best man's arm and moved in rhythm with the music. She could feel Margaret's eyes—that wondering look. Then she saw Tom across the church. He smiled and she wanted to cry again.

It was over, all of it. Wedding and reception—and Tom was waiting for her to change her clothes. Margaret came into the room a few minutes after Alice had slipped out of the rose jersey.

"Lovely, wasn't it?"

"Uh-huh—Margie, I want it that way, too. You knew that all the time, didn't you?" Alice pulled her white linen skirt over her head.

"Well—" Margaret sat on the edge of the bed and watched Alice—the same questioning wonder.

"I do—I think Tom'd rather have it right, too."

"Oh," Margaret kicked off the silver sandals.

Alice buttoned the linen jacket and ran a comb through her soft hair. Then with a deliberate movement she formed a red mouth over her lips. "Margie—" she put the lipstick on the dresser and walked to the bed, "Margie, thanks so much for—well, for everything."

"Why, silly—I haven't done a thing."

"Yes, you have. Always you've done things for me—maybe without knowing it, but—well, guess I've got to go now. I'll call you tomorrow."

"Have a good time with Tom—I do like him."

"Bye, honey."

Alice walked slowly down the steps. Tom was waiting for her at the bottom. When he looked up Alice's heart skipped and suddenly she was afraid—what if he should be angry when she told him—what if he didn't love her for anymore than that—

"Honey, the more I think about it, the more I know you're going to make a beautiful bride!" Tom was laughing up at her. Then, suddenly he was serious. There were still people around—people who hadn't left after the reception—but he looked at her as if there were no one else in the room. It was almost the same look he had given her that night they met—only more intimate. His uniform fit his big frame well and Alice thought that, truly, he looked stronger than he had looked at any other time in the

two years she had known him. She wondered if he had guessed that she had changed her mind—how would she say it?

“Tom—Tom, I can’t come—you know?” Well, it was said, bluntly. She searched his face for the tense lines that formed around his eyes when he was angry.

“Uh-huh, I know. It was written all over your face when you came down that aisle.” He smiled at her as she stood one step above him.

“Tom, is it all right?”

“Sure, honey—we want it right, too—wedding and all, don’t we?” He sounded a little embarrassed. “And Alice—how about dancing tonight . . . I’ve got to catch that one o’clock train, anyway—will you see me off?”

“Oh, Tom!” Alice laughed up at him and squeezed his hand hard.

Fantasy

Joseph Waxberg

MATTY watched the heavy snow fall. He opened the window and put his head out. He closed his eyes and breathed deeply. He felt the cool snowflakes land softly on his cheeks.

“I’m going out.”

“What” exclaimed his roommate. “In this snow? Are you daft?”

Matty slipped his heavy mackinaw on and went out into the white countryside. When he reached the little bridge that crossed the creek he turned into a path that led down beneath the bridge.

The creek roared past. The snowflakes floated gently down and fused into the swiftly moving creek.

“Didn’t think I’d find anyone out in this weather.” Matty turned quickly. A tall, dark complexioned, unshaven man came down the path.

“Hello,” Matty said.

“What are you doing out in this weather?” the man asked as he put the rolled up blanket he had been carrying against the bridge foundation.

“Just thinking, I guess.”

“Mustn’t think too much,” the stranger said. “It’s not good